

Message Text

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 5696

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SN
SUBJECT: ALTERNATIVE ELECTION RESULTS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE
SIGNIFICANCE FOR SINGAPORE'S FUTURE AND U.S. INTERESTS

SUMMARY. IN THE ABSENCE OF INSTITUTIONALIZED PUBLIC OPINION
POLLS, AND LACKING THE PRESCIENCE OF SOME OF OUR COLLEAGUES
ELSEWHERE, THE EMBASSY DECLINES TO PREDICT FLATLY THE OUT-
COME OF THE SINGAPORE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR
DECEMBER 23, ALTHOUGH THE INCUMBENT PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY (PAPA)
DEFINITELY HAS THE INSIDE TRACK. IN THE BODY OF THIS COMMUNICATION
WE SPELL OUT FOUR POSSIBLE ELECTION RESULTS --- RANGING FROM
PAPA SWEEP AT ONE EXTREME TO AN UPSET VICTORY FOR THE OPPOSITION
AT THE OTHER. SINCE THE PAPA- ONLY NEEDS TO CAPTURE 19
OF THE 53 CONTESTED SEATS TO CONTROL THE PARLIAMENT AND TO
ESTABLISH A GOVERNMENT, A PAP VICTORY AND A CONTINUATION
OF PAP POLICIES IS VIRTUALLY A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. HOWEVER,
THE OPPOSITION PARTIES COULD IMPROVE ON THEIR POPULAR VOTE
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SHOWING OF 1972 AND EVEN OBTAIN PRESENCE IN THE PARLIAMENT.
THE MAGNITUDE OF ANY SUCH GAINS COULD AFFECT THE INTERNAL
POLICIES OF A PAP-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT AND, IN CIRCUMSTANCES, ITS EX-
TERNAL POLICIES AS WELL. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH INSTITUTIONALIZED PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ARE UNKNOWN

IN SINGAPORE, VIRTUALLY EVERY LOCAL AND FOREIGN OBSERVER PREDICTS THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY(PAP) WILL WIN THE NATIONAL ELECTION BEING HELD ON DECEMBER 23 BY AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY. IN VIEW OF THIS COMMON ASSESSMENT ATTENTION IS CURRENTLY BEING FOCUSED ON THE SIZE OF THE ANTICIPATED PAP VICTORY AND WHETHER IT WILL WIN ALL THE 53 CONTESTED SEATS. (THE PAP HAS ALREADY WON 16 UNCONTESTED SEATS. IT HAS SWEEPED ALL SEATS IN THE PAST TWO ELECTIONS.)

2. THE PROBABLE PARAMETERS OF THE ELECTION RETURNS HAVE BEEN ALREADY SET BY FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM AND WORKER'S PARTY CHIEF JEYARETNAM. THE LATTER PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE OPPOSITION HOPES TO WIN AS MUCH AS 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE, WHICH WOULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OVER THE 30 PERCENT THE OPPOSITION RECEIVED IN 1972. ONE EMBASSY SOURCE INDICATES THAT JEYARETNAM PRIVATELY BELIEVES THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS ONLY A CHANCE OF WINNING FOUR PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. THE PAP, SPEAKING THROUGH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM, HAS CLAIMED THAT IT WILL TAKE ALL OF THE 53 CONTESTED SEATS AND THE OPPOSITION VOTE WILL BE REDUCED TO 25 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL. (YET ANOTHER INDICATION AS TO THE POSSIBLE ELECTION OUTCOME IS REVEALED BY AN AD HOC OPINION POLL BASED ON 1000 INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE'S DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST CLUB. ACCORDING TO THIS SURVEY, FULLY 99 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS ARE REPORTED AS VIEWING THE PAP AS "THE RESPONDENTS ARE REPORTED AS VIEWING THE PAP AS "THE MOST VIABLE POLITICAL PARTY." THIS OPINION NOTWITHSTANDING, 34 PERCENT OF THE POLLEES STATED THEY WOULD VOTE FOR AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE FOR THE SAKE OF CREATING A PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION.)

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3. ALTHOUGH THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE PAP WILL WIN BY A LARGE MAJORITY, IT IS UNABLE TO PREDICT WHETHER THE ACTUAL OUTCOME WILL BE NEARER TO OPPOSITION OR PAP EXPECTATIONS. HOWEVER, THE SIZE OF THE OPPOSITION VOTE AND THE PAP'S LIKELY MARGIN OF VICTORY WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT BEARING ON SINGAPORE'S FUTURE STABILITY AS WELL AS ON U.S. INTERESTS. SET FORTH BELOW ARE POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE OUTCOMES OF THE SINGAPORE GENERAL ELECTION AND THE EMBASSY'S ESTIMATE OF THE RESPECTIVE IMPACT OF EACH ON SINGAPORE' FUTURE STABILITY AND U.S. INTERESTS.

A. A PAP SWEEP OF ALL SEATS WITH NO INCREASE OR EVEN SOME DIMINUTION IN THE PROTEST VOTE.

THIS OUTCOME, WHICH IS WHAT THE PAP IS CLEARLY SEEKING, WOULD PRODUCE OVER THE SHORT TERM A CONTINUATION OF PRESENT POLICIES, AND THE IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS WOULD BE NEGLIGIBLE. HOWEVER, OVER THE LONGER TERM SUCH A RESULT MIGHT PRODUCE SOME NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES. THE PAP LEADERSHIP

COULD BE TEMPTED TO ACT WITH EVEN LESS CONSIDERATION OF POPULAR VIEWS THAN IT DOES NOW, IN THE BELIEF THAT IT NEED NOT FEAR ANY ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES. THE OPPOSITION WOULD BECOME INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED AND WOULD BE MORE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WAS SIMPLY NO CHANCE OF MAKING ANY HEAD-WAY AGAINST THE PAP JUGGERNAUT THROUGH THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. CONSEQUENTLY, SOME OPPOSITION ELEMENTS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO TURN TO NON-DEMOCRATIC MEANS OF PURSUING THEIR OBJECTIVES. FURTHERMORE, IF THE PAP WERE TO ACHIEVE A SWEEP IN THREE CONSECUTIVE ELECTIONS, IT WOULD MEAN THAT A NEW GENERATION OF SINGAPOREANS WOULD EMERGE WITH ABSOLUTELY NO CONCEPT OF A DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION. WHILE U.S. INTERESTS WOULD NOT BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED OVER THE SHORT RUN, ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IN THE LONG TERM COULD LEAD TO AN UNHEALTHY POLITICAL CLIMATE IN WHICH THE U.S. MIGHT BECOME MORE OF A TARGET FOR THE OPPOSITION THAN IT IS TODAY.

B. A PAP VICTORY WITH SLIGHTLY INCREASED OPPOSITION VOTE AND/
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OR THE CAPTURE OF TWO OR THREE PARLIAMENTARY SEATS.

IN THE EMBASSY'S VIEW, THIS WOULD BE THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOME FOR BOTH SINGAPORE'S FUTURE WELL BEING AND STABILITY AND U.S. INTERESTS. THE PAP COULD NOT REGARD SUCH A RESULT AS THREATENING AND MIGHT POSSIBLY REACT CONSTRUCTIVELY IN RESPONSE TO A MODEST RISE IN THE PROTEST VOTE. WHEN NOT FACED BY AN IMMINENT ELECTION SOME PAP LEADERS ADMIT THAT IT IS NOT HEALTHY FOR THE OPPOSITION TO REDUCED TO ITS PRESENT INEFFECTUAL STATE AND FOR THE PAP TO CONFRONT NO OPPOSITION SPOKESMEN IN PARLIAMENT. THERE IS A FAIR CHANCE THAT SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD CAUSE THE PAP TO BEHAVE A LITTLE LESS AROGANTLY TOWARD THE PUBLIC AT LARGE AND PROVIDE A BETTER OUTLET FOR THE OPPOSITION TO LET OFF STEAM. MOST OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WOULD SEE THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING TO BE GAINED BY PURSUING THEIR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES THROUGH OPEN DEMOCRATIC MEANS AND WOULD BE LESS TEMPTED TO TURN TO SUBVERSIVE METHODS. MOREOVER, YOUNG BUSINESSMEN AND PROFESSIONALS WHO CURRENTLY AVOID POLITICS AND SEE LITTLE POINT IN SEEKING ELECTIVE OFFICE, WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO AGREE TO BECOME CANDIDATES IF THERE WERE MEANINGFUL COMPETITION BETWEEN THE PAP AND OTHER PARTIES. IN THIS MORE HELTHY POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE U.S. INTERESTS WOULD CONTINUE TO THRIVE IN SINGAPORE. POTENTIAL INVESTORS MIGHT BE REASSURED THAT IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES FUTURE CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED SMOOTHLY AND WITH LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE AND ABRUPT CHANGES OF POLICY. SINCE FOREIGN POLICY HAS NOT BEEN A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SEE LITTLE REASON TO CHANGE ITS PRESENT POLICIES TOWARDS U.S. INTERESTS. HOWEVER, IF ONE OR TWO OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE ELECTED, WE

WOULD HAVE TO ASSUME THAT THEY WOULD USE
THEIR PARLIAMENTARY POSITION TO ASK QUESTIONS ON FOREIGN
RELATIONS. IN DOING SO, THEY MIGHT ATTEMPT TO CRITICIZE OR
EMBARRASS THE GOS WITH RESPECT TO ITS RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.

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C. PAP VICTORY WITH SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED MAJORITY.

SHOULD THE OPPOSITION PARTIES MANAGE TO WIN MORE THAN 8 OR
9 SEATS AND/OR COLLECT 40 PERCENT OR MORE OF THE POPULAR
VOTE, IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED A "MORAL VICTORY" FOR THE
OPPOSITION AND WOULD CAUSE THE PAP TO SUFFER A CONSIDERABLE
LOSS OF FACE. SUCH AN IMPROBABLE OUTCOME MIGHT BRING IN ITS
WAKE UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES. SHOCKED BY THE IMPLICATIONS OF
SUCH A RESULT, THE PAP MIGHT WELL OVER-REACT AND BE TEMPTED
TO ADOPT STRONG-ARM METHODS TO ELIMINATE THE OPPOSITION. THIS
COULD CAUSE THE PAP TO ALTER ITS CURRENT POLICY OF DISTINGUISHING
BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATIC AND NON-DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION
AND EVENTUALLY DRAW CHARGES OF HEIGHTENED REPRESSION
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. FURTHERMORE, EFFORTS
TO ELIMINATE THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION WOULD PROBABLY
DIVERT THE GOVERNMENT FROM PURSUING ENLIGHTENED SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS. THIS COULD IN TURN UNDERMINE
BUSINESS CONFIDENCE, POTENTIAL INVESTORS HESITATING TO
MAKE NEW COMMITMENTS. ALSO, WITH AN ACTIVE AND SIGNI-
FICANT MINORITY IN PARLIAMENT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FEEL
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COMPELLED TO PURSUE A MORE BALANCED NON-ALIGNED POLICY AND
BE LESS WILLING TO FACILITATE U.S. MILITARY INTERESTS.

A VARIANT ON THIS ELECTION OUTCOME WOULD BE FOR THE PAP TO GARNER ONLY A PLURALITY OF SEATS IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT AND THUS BE FORCED INTO A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH ONE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. (THIS SCENARIO OF COURSE ASSUMES AN INABILITY ON THE PART OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES THEMSELVES TO CONSTITUTE A GOVERNMENT). JEYARETNAM'S WORKER'S PARTY WOULD BE THE MOST LIKELY COALITION CHOICE FOR THE PAP, CONSIDERING THE MODERATION OF THE WP'S PLATFORM AND THE RELATIVELY LARGE SIZE OF ITS CONSTITUENCY IN COMPARISON WITH THE OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES.

D. UPSET VICTORY FOR THE OPPOSITION.
ALTHOUGH NO RESPONSIBLE OBSERVER IN SINGAPORE INCLUDING MOSTE LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION) BELIEVE THAT THE OPPOSITION PARITIES HAVE THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE OF WINNING 35 SEATS (A MAJORITY), IN THE EVENT SUCH AN UPSET OCCURRED THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BOTH SINGAPORE AND U.S. INTERESTS WOULD BE MOST UNFORTUNATE. NONE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES EXPECT TO WIN AND NONE ARE PRE-PARED TO GOVERN. FURTHERMORE, SINCE NONE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE CONTESTING A MAJORITY OF THE SEATS, ANY GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE FORMED OUT OF A COALITION OF VARIOUS OPPOSITION PARTIES WHOSE ONLY COMMON INTEREST IS THEIR ANTAGONISM TO THE PAP. THEY HAVE NO COMMON IDEOLOGY, NO COMMON PROGRAM, AND DERIVE THEIR STRENGTH FROM DISPARATE ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION. SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD HERALD A PROLONGED PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY AND INCREASING INSTABILITY WHICH WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE A HIGHLY NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY. U.S. INTERESTS WOULD ALSO SUFFER. ALTHOUGH FOREIGN POLICY HAS NOT BEEN A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN, THE JOINT OPPOSITION COUNCIL LED BY THE BARISAN SOSIALIS PARTY WOULD BE OPENLY
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ANTI-US. THE WORKER'S PARTY, WHILE NOT ANTI-AMERICAN, HAS ADVOCATED THAT SINGAPORE PURSUE A MORE GENUINELY NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY. THEREFORE, AN OPPOSITION VICTORY WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY ALTER APPRECIABLY THE CURRENT GOS WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE OUR 7TH FLEET WITH ACCESS TO SINGAPORE FACILITIES. U.S. INVESTMENT WOULD ALSO SUFFER FROM THE UNCERTAIN AND UNSTABLE POLITICAL SITUATION AS WELL AS FROM THE MORE NEGATIVE AND POSSIBLY HOSTILE ATTITUDES AND POLICIES WHICH SUCH A COALITION GOVERNMENT MIGHT ADOPT TOWARD FOREIGN INVESTMENT.
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